No. 8.

THE THEOSOPHICAL FORUM.

Issued by direction and under the authority of the American Section of the Theosophical Society in Convention for free distribution to members. Members of Branches will receive copies through their officers. The Theosophical Society is not responsible for any statements contained herein. WILLIAM Q. JUDGE, General Secretary.

* * *

Each member can send questions, answers to questions, opinions, and notes upon Theosophical subjects. When necessary, the various communications will be condensed by the editor. Members will be careful to write on only one side of the paper and to use black ink.

All communications should be addressed to ALEXANDER FULLERTON, BOX 2659, NEW YORK CITY.

For paragraphs under the word "Ans." the editor is personally responsible.

December, 1889.

QUESTION XXV.

What is meant by the expression, "the expansion and contraction of the Astral Light?" (*See page* 263, PATH *of November*, 1889.)

W. B.—The expression referred to was a quotation from the *Path* of April, 1889. The school to which the writer of that belongs holds that the Astral Light, or the *Akasa* as the Hindus call it, has its regular expansion and contraction, and that it is this which brings about the involuntary action of the heart of man in expanding and contracting, in order to force the blood through the body, and that it in like manner causes us to inhale and exhale in breathing. These two natural actions have never been explained by science. Atlhough every person breathes during sleep when the mind is withdrawn from the physical frame, and man has always done so, yet to this day it is as little understood as ever. But if we postulate the Astral Light and its regular expansion and contraction, then we can begin to understand how its influence upon us causes the two involuntary motions so necessary to life. It is held that this motion of the Akasa is one of its properties which exhibits itself in the world through appropriate intermediate causes.

QUESTION XXVI.

Is it right to hold that the spiritual progress of the race is dependent upon the will of any power, person, Adept, Mahatma, or God?

Ans.—No, it would not be right to hold that. But probably nobody does. The transfer of any department of evolution from the region of law to the region of caprice would be repugnant to all just thought. Yet it by no means follows that in such department, spiritual or physical, there may not be intelligent participation by a power of any grade, *working under law.* Such things occur daily in familiar life. A boy exhibits talent for mechanics. His guardians detect it and assist its ripening by furnishing him with tools, models, and opportunities to visit factories. Later on he is apprenticed to a skilled workman and learns gradually the processes and niceties of his trade. Ultimately he becomes himself a master and teaches others in his turn. Similarly with a child showing a bent for music, the fine arts, or law. The initial impulse is in the pupil. Outsiders do not create it, they do not even force it; but they may foster, stimulate, and guide it, always under the conditions and methods belonglng thereto.

Just so in spiritual progress, terrestrial, racial, or individual. We can conceive of philanthropic beings watching over and aiding it, from a Dhyan Chohan down to a guru. It is entirely permissible to suppose that, to the quick perception of such a being, the slightest spiritual aspiration is at once apparent. To foment it would be a pleasure. Without any arbitrary or violent interposition, and quite analogically with educational aids such as have been referred to, an aspiration of a world, a race, or a man may be appropriately aided and obstructions to it modified.

It may, of course, be said that such assistance is at the option of the higher being, and that therefore, so far as his assistance is needed, spiritual progress is dependent on him. But this is only what may be said of every other process in the universe. We are not isolated atoms, working out our destiny solely from within, and sustainiug no relation to or interaction with other emanations from the center of life. Rather are we parts of an organic whole, each affecting and being affected by

all others. In so far as any of us put forth, or refrain to put forth, a helpful force, so far are the results of such force conditioned upon us. As to this, spiritual interests are in no wise different from others. Moreover, it is to be remembered that it is the *nature* of these higher beings to give spontaneous aid to spiritual awakenings. Beneficence is the law of their lives. Not to welcome and foster an aspiration would be as contrary to nature, and therefore as impossible, as would pleasure in a debauch or a prize-fight. In supposing, then, that spiritual evolution may be overseen and assisted by higher minds, always acting under laws which they comprehend and value, we are not saying that it is dependent upon the "will" of any one, for the "will" in this case is not an arbitrary and irresponsible volition, but an habitual exercise of a fixed nature.

And, indeed, it is this last fact which makes possible an assurance of the final triumph everywhere of good. If "will" was anything else than character putting itself in action, and if there was uncertainty as to character's maintaining and exerting itself, the future would be problematical. But happily it is otherwise. Back of everything lies Ahura-Mazda, and the various "Thrones and dominions and principalities and powers" between the Supreme Good and ourselves are not shifting and shiftless energies, but intelligences with goodness like their source. The ignorance and the error which produce evil must finally disappear, for the perfect is more comprehending than the imperfect, and right cannot permanently be thwarted by wrong. Thus the highest, richest powers, even the very Law Itself, are ever potent on the side of good, and the very constitution of things makes certain the ultimate supremacy of health over disease and of truth over falsehood. The "will" of every Adept and semi-divine being is free, but because of its being the expression of a character known to be pure, and because that character is rooted in the permanent rather than in the illusionary, the side it will support may be foreseen. And as that support will always be given to spiritual strivings, and as the success of those strivings is assured, the completion of the spiritual evolution of the race, though not dependent on a mere "will," is as certain as the continuance of that "will."

QUESTION XXVII.

In the PATH *it is stated that "a dream is the going out of a part of our principles into the Astral Light." This raises a desire for information relative to the inspiration—so called—of poets, artists, inventors, and others.*

W. Q. J.—The definition of a dream referred to is not to my mind adequate, for there are many sorts of dreams all due to different causes. Believing, as I do, that in the Astral Light are the pictures of all that man has ever done or made, and that at this stage of evolution it is not possible to bring forth anything really new, the so-called inspirations may often be due to the fact that the organism of those "inspired" more easily permits the influx of the pictures in the Astral Light, and then their production in verse, paintings, inventions, or what not. In an article entitled "Genius" by H. P. Blavatsky in *Lucifer* for November, 1889, the idea is advanced that the great geniuses, of whatever kind, are examples of the Ego, which is all-knowing, shining through and informing the physical body inhabited. It is not necessary to dream in order to be inspired, for the sudden inrush of poetical ideas and of new inventions may be due wholly to the pervious state of the organism. While we often hear of such ideas arising in dream, yet from what is known of the poets, painters, and others, we are forced to the conclusion that the greater number of inspirations are during the waking state, and this supports the view put forward by H. P. Blavatsky in the article upon "Genius."

E. U.—The question about dreams leads to the reflection that the dreams we have are nearly always absurd. Clear dreams or those prophetic come rarely. When they reach us we remember them for years. Those of us who often dream know that nonsense is their characteristic and overfeeding often their cause. But as some rare and valuable ones are known of, we must admit a power to dream connectedly and with sense. Is it not, then, true that such a prevalence of foolish dreams shows that there is something wrong with our waking state that reflects itself into sleep? If we regulated ourselves every mo-

ment during the day, would not our dreams become coherent? And how many of us could mark any one day with a white stone showing that it had been free from folly, anger, or desire? Not one.

Z.—If the dreamers of dreams and these wise explainers of them knew what dreams really meant, they might say less and dream more. There is in the dreaming condition a faculty exercised which may be called, for the want of a better word, "exaggeration of circumstance," and another that we can call "reversion of images." Then there is "symbolical diminution," as well as diminution due to absence of all power to relate. Add to these the fact that, until you have your senses about you, even in a dream, so as to be able to know what the physical brain is doing, none of these disturbing and producing causes can be observed and allowed for.

E. J.—It seems to me that absurd dreams—such as are the commonest—are when the governor—the soul—is away, leaving the mind like a naughty child roaming where it will; and when the soul is clear and in control of the mind, the dream is of consequence or full of beauty, hope, inspiration, or warning.

QUESTION XXVIII.

In what manner does entrance on the path of occultism cause the special evil latent in the individual to express itself in his life and acts? Is it because early steps in occult knowledge destroy the force of the conventional ideas of morality and abrogate the laws which society and formal religion have adopted for their security; and that, therefore, for a time, until the principles of ALTRUISM *assume definite sway over his mind and motives, the individual is without practical and efficient restraints upon his* LOWER SELF? *Or is it, on the other hand, the operation of a* KARMIC LAW *upon the character of the individual, making use of his* PERSONAL VANITY *as a fulcrum for forcing the special weakness of his Lower Self into a reckless expression of itself?*

W. Q. J.—While the questioner answers his question him-

self, it only gives half of the subject. The real study—on the path—of occultism not only brings out latent evil but also latent good. The right way to express it is, "the study of true occultism, or the walking on its path, brings up the entire latent character of the person." Hence while some in this case suddenly seem to grow worse and worse, others suddenly grow better, deeper, broader, and finer. It is customary to look at the shadow in these matters. While it is true that the majority of men are inherently bad, there are examples of the opposite. The study of occultism does not destroy rules of right and wrong, but the student, having opened up the fires below the surface, may be easily carried away in the sudden heat engendered. The dweller of the threshold in *Zanoni* is no fiction. It is ever with each student, for it is the baser part of humanity that he begins in real earnest as never before to fight. At the same time, the brightly shining Adonai is also there to help and save if we will let that be done. Karma that might not operate except after years or lives is called upon and falls, as H. P. B. has so clearly stated, in one mass upon the head of him who has called upon immutable law. "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread," and, rushing in before they have the slightest idea of their own character even on its surface, they are often destroyed. But the practice of altruism is not by itself occultism, and it saves from danger and prepares one for another incarnation in some body and age when everything will favor us. We have yet left some few hundred thousand of mortal years, and ought not to be too precipitate.

Ans.—There are, no doubt, special occult laws which account for this, but we may see even on our plane reasons why it should be so. One is that the immediate tendency of Occultism is to reveal fact as opposed to illusion. It does this in the physical and the social worlds, dispelling fantasy, exhibiting things as they are, making clear the actual relations of things to men and of men to each other. But it does it also in the individual character, stripping off disguises, mistakes, and shams, introverting the mental eye, bathing the man in an atmosphere deadly to all which conceives or fosters falsehood. Of course,

so far as this influence is consciously welcomed, the more healthy and prompt are its effects; but it is quite possible for a person only partially devoted to Occultism, and not wholly consecrated to it as the *sine quâ non* of life, to be more or less insensibly affected by the tendency mentioned. There would be a loosening of intentional constraint, a weakening of the impulse to masquerade, a relaxation to all the checks to direct action of character. In this general dissolution of covers and bonds, the evil of the nature would be disclosed no less than the good, and very ugly traits, perhaps quite unsuspected, would see the light.

Then, again, here is another fact. The first injunction of Occult Science is "Know thyself." When such knowledge has progressed to a certain stage, it is seen that its true value lies in the revelation to the individual of his relation to the Whole, but the initial result may easily be an emphasis on the importance of the self which is the subject of study. Thence would come an uplifting of personal peculiarities, and a much more complete exhibition of nature than would have occurred if the occult maxim had never been encountered.

A third fact has weight. Occultism discloses regions of law and power unheard of in ordinary education. When the matter of phenomena first becomes known to a man, he is apt to be fascinated and thrilled. The ability to do the things narrated of Adepts seems to him so glorious as to surpass any dignity of Kings or Nobles. What must be the sensations of one who can defy time and space, flash from country to country in his astral body, mystify and confound his neighbors with displays of magical power! Ambition of every other kind might be utterly dormant in him, but such a possibility wakens every nerve of his being. He may be ignorant and stupid and provincial, as unfit to use occult forces as to conduct an astronomical observatory, but none of this is perceived by him. He quivers with the thought of what he could do as an Adept. Now it is just here that the man's inmost desires emerge into form. He may, of course, picture a race cheered and uplifted, but he is quite as likely—at that stage—to picture enemies laid low, rivals humiliated, himself the center of boundless honor and envy. It is quite safe to say that the conception of himself as an Adept

is a sure test of what are a man's deepest wishes. But that is a conception which he encounters at the very threshold of the Path.

QUESTION XXIX.

If it is untheosophical to destroy the life of any creature "lest ye slay the meanest thing upon its upward way," how should one deal with noxious and poisonous animals?

L. A. L.—Rules are always dangerous, since they necessarily express only one aspect of truth. It might almost be said that a Theosophist is not only not bound to live by rule, but is bound not to live by rule; or, at least, that the rule he adopts must possess an expansive power that will enable it to accommodate a growing apprehension of truth. A Theosophist is bound to make war on evil in all forms, and even as he is bound to deny a falsehood or check a slander, he is bound to check the career of a mad dog or a poisonous snake. His regard for life in its lower forms should not lead him to endanger life in its higher forms. The same charity that makes him protect an animal from the cruelty of man must make him protect man from the cruelty of an animal.

It is against the wanton or malicious destruction of life that he protests. It has been said that the sequence of an Englishman's thought is: "What a beautiful morning! Let's go and kill something." Such an act not only hinders the victim upon its "upward way," but the victimizer also. It adds to the burden of the world by deadening the sense of man's fellowship with all creatures. It is not too much to say that when it is necessary to kill even a venomous animal, it should be done in a spirit of charity and justice, and with an entire absence of angry or revengeful feelings. Death is not to be dealt out as a punishment. It is a change in which the elements that constitute the living organism are dissolved and made ready for new combinations. Not because we hate the man-eater would we slay him, but because we love man,—nay, even because we love the tiger himself, and because we believe that in the beautiful alembic of nature the force which now manifests itself as evil

will be transformed into power from which all may draw strength.

Ans.—Is it quite certain that to destroy the life of any creature is untheosophical? It is, no doubt, un-Buddhistic, but Buddhism is not coextensive with Theosophy.

In no region is the sternest and most practical common-sense more needed than in Theosophy, for nowhere is there greater danger of disproportion or extremes. And of all that region no section more illustrates it than the sentimental. The doctrine of universal love is noble and exhilarating, so exhilarating that it sometimes makes weak heads to spin and unbalanced minds to flop. Just as we see silly women denouncing jails and sending bouquets to murderers, we find the feminine intellect in both sexes wailing over punishment rather than over crime, and pitying assailants instead of their victims. Exaggeration of sentiment inevitably ends in a two-fold evil,—the overthrow of rights, justice, and discernment, and the mounting of the bad and worthless upon the prostrate good. This and superstition are the two tendencies which masculine Theosophists have to combat, and to do it regardless of the holding up of hands and the rolling up of eyes.

Reverence for life, merely as life and irrespective of its character, is a case in point. The historical fact of St. Simeon Stylites restoring his vermin to his flesh and saying "Eat what God has given you," and the legend of Buddha offering himself as food to a famished tigress, illustrate in the East what extreme vegetarianism and the hostility to the death-penalty illustrate in the West. One form is the idea referred to in the question and demolished by *L. A. L.*, viz: that dangerous reptiles should not be destroyed. But why not? The right to life, no matter how full, does not include the right to make life unbearable or uncertain to every other living thing; for animals exist, just as human beings exist, upon the understanding that they do not invade the equal privileges of others. As we cannot, even if it was desirable, establish places of confinement for scorpions and snakes and vermin, there is nothing else to be

done than to put them out of the way. There is no more reason for sighs over a defunct centipede than for sighs over a defunct assassin. The common safety requires extermination.

One may even go further. Human beings have a right to comfort as well as to life. Now if, in the marvellous fecundity of Nature, there are produced low forms which subserve no special end, and if the question arises whether they or man shall be sacrificed, there need be no mawkish hesitation. A Theosophist can clear his house of roaches or rats as remorselessly as can a materialist. Tolerance of vermin and dirt is not enjoined by spirituality or by common-sense, still less by their union. In fact, it is by their union, and not by either alone, that ethical questions are to be solved. As man has a spirit and a body, so his judgment must have relation to the unseen and to the seen, have a supra-material and a material side, conform to the two conditions under which he exists. A Theosophist ignoring matter violates precisely the same law as a materialist ignoring spirit. Both entities are real, and both are to be recognized. And thus—coming back to the question—we see that the same great truth which shows that Man should soar towards the Infinite, shows also that snakes and bugs may properly be destroyed.

QUESTION XXX.

What relation does Mr. Sinnett's "Esoteric Buddhism" bear to Theosophy and the Theosophical Society?

Z.—As this work was the first definite presentation to the West of the old doctrines about man and nature, it certainly has an important relation to the present Theosophical movement, and when one remembers the efforts made to convince the author of the truth of the doctrines propounded, and sees the wide acceptation of the book in both Europe and America, the wisdom of the effort made and the importance of the result are apparent. Furthermore, it is well known that *Esoteric Buddhism* is made up almost wholly of selections from letters alleged to have been written to Mr. Sinnett by the Mahatma. This gives it importance. And while some few errors have crept into it, as was

inevitable and as H. P. Blavatsky has shown in the *Secret Doctrine*, yet it is certainly correct in the main. But no one should conclude from its title that the doctrines contained in it are those of the Buddhists, any more than they are peculiar to the Brahmins. They were first published in the *Theosophist*, while Mr. Sinnett was in India, under the title "Fragments of Occult Truth," and later on cast into the present form with copious additions: for this we have the author's word in the preface to the first edition. Every student of Theosophy should not merely read this book, but ought to study it with care, and all the more so if the ideas are unfamiliar; but at the same time the corrections made in the *Secret Doctrine* should be used to clear up points that otherwise would not perhaps be perfectly plain. *Esoteric Buddhism* in my opinion, therefore, will always rank as one of our best works, not only because of the clearness of the author's style, but also because it is the first concrete presentation of Theosophical doctrines to the West in this Theosophical cycle.

Ans.—It is difficult to over-rate the merit of *Esoteric Buddhism*, whether considered as a Theosophical text-book or merely as a literary jewel. Its singular lucidity of statement, its exquisite beauty of diction, its delicate flavor of verbal selection—so savory to the literary palate, its copious exposure of objections and the conclusiveness with which they are met, its systematic evolution of the scheme of human progression, the cultured taste which never wastes a word or mars a sentence, all these things, and many more, make it radiant with strength and grace. There is, indeed, one important rectification in the title which has been urged by Madame Blavatsky. It is that the word should be "Budhism," not "Buddhism," *i. e.*, that the book should be known as an exposition of "Esoteric Knowledge" and not of the esoteric teachings of the Buddhist system. This might easily be made, and the change would not only secure correctness—always an invaluable aim, but avoid mistake in many inquiring minds, and excite attention from a class who do not care for a supposed exhibit of the doctrines held by an Eastern cult, but who enjoy research in knowledge remote from the common-place.

Not slightly interesting is the fact that one of the very best introductions to Theosophic facts is the pamphlet written by Mrs. Sinnett, *The Purpose of Theosophy*. It gives a clear sketch of the great and beautiful edifice erected by her husband, prepares a beginner for the fuller, deeper truths he has so brilliantly elaborated, and is constantly used in both England and America by inquirers.

In Mr. Sinnett's other work, *The Occult World*, the subject of phenomena is treated, and many illustrations are given of their extraordinary character and the impossibility of their production by other than occult means. It is this book, rather than *Esoteric Buddhism*, which deals with the Theosophical Society, and, besides the proof that the Society has behind it deeply interested and helpful minds belonging to the Himalayan Brotherhood, closes with the advice which many Theosophists have heeded, and which all may heed to their souls' health,—"Register, Register, Register."

Copies of FORUM *No.* 1 *cannot be supplied. A copy of any other number can be had by sending five cents in stamps to the Editor.*

Printed on the Aryan Press.